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The Black Cat

August 1904

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Vol. IX. No. 11. Whole No. 107. Copyright 1904, by The Shortstory Publishing Co.

Price, 5 Cents

THE SHORTSTORY PUBLISHING CO 144 HIGH ST BOSTON MASS.

SEVEN AGES OF SOROSIS

The Infant, School Girl, College Girl, and Bride,
Young Mother, Matron, Honored Age, have tried
Sorosis Shoes, and will have none beside.

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A Monthly Magazine of Original Short Stories.

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Vol. IX., No. 11.
Whole No., 107.

AUGUST, 1904.

5 cents a copy.
50 cents a year.

Entered at the Post-Office at Boston, Mass., as second-class matter.

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The Pale Miss Knight.*

BY ELIZABETH WEST.

DURING one of the years that I was at the art school, I found it necessary to earn some money to tide me over the next year of study and, through a friend of a friend, obtained a position as a public school teacher in a little New Hampshire town. The business of engaging me to teach the summer term was done by letter. I had never even heard of the place, and knew no one there. But I followed the written directions and found a beautiful little village nestled at the foot of the mountains, some distance from the railroad, reached by a stage ride of several miles. I was to board in the family of one of the trustees, a Mr. Simmons, the letter said.

It was rather peculiar the way that arrangement came about. It seemed that when my letter accepting the position was read in the school committee meeting, Mr. Simmons had said immediately that he would like to take me as a boarder, as his wife had been thinking for a long time that she would like some young person about the house for company. Of course I didn't know that until afterwards, but I could see plainly enough the moment I entered the house and saw Mrs. Simmons, that it wasn't the kind of house nor the sort of woman that took boarders as a rule.

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I was wild to get out my water-colors the minute I saw the house, a perfect bower of climbing roses with a grove behind of the grandest pine trees stretching out towards the hills. When I thought of how the wind would murmur through those pines all summer I felt thankful from the depths of my heart that my lot had been cast in so pleasant a place.

I said as much to Mrs. Simmons when she came to my room to see if I found everything in order, quite as if I were a friend instead of a paying guest, but she didn't seem to like the way I expressed my gratitude. She was a short, frail-looking woman with big, sad, blue eyes and sweet, almost childish, features. When I told her how much I liked the dainty pink room with the tall pines outside, she made some answer in a low tone, but the voice was indistinct and choked and when I turned to see what the matter was, I saw that her eyes were full of tears. She turned away hastily, as if to hide her face, while I felt so awkward to find that I must have expressed my thanks so clumsily that I resolved to use less impulsiveness when I spoke to her again.

Perhaps it was my very reluctance to talk freely afterwards that made her anxious to have things pleasant for me, for she really put herself out all the afternoon to entertain me. We walked about the garden and then down the road about an eighth of a mile to the schoolhouse where I was to begin my experiment in teaching the next morning.

The school building stood on the main road of the village but at some distance from the neighboring houses. It was shaded on three sides by elms and maples that must have been growing many years.

Mrs. Simmons worked hard helping me take down a lot of evergreen boughs from over the clock and pictures; she told me the school hadn't been opened since the winter term, as the farmers were all so busy during the spring; these boughs were the decorations at the closing day. If she had laughed once, or even smiled, or lost for a second her doubtful, grieved look I should have spent a pleasant afternoon, but, as it was, every time I caught her sad, melancholy glance I felt as if a cloud were settling down upon me and I longed to get out into the open air and sunshine.

Just before we came away from the schoolhouse she suggested

that we get a broom to sweep up the pine needles that had fallen upon the floor, saying that the janitor had told her that he had finished his work there when he handed over the key for me, that I might find that if the needles were left upon the floor, the pupils would track them around, or perhaps use them for playthings when the excitements of opening studies began to wane. As she spoke she started towards one of two doors at the back of the room, to look for the broom, I surmised. I walked toward the other door, thinking that I should save time by searching there while she looked in the other closet. I had barely turned the knob when she startled me by crying out in a voice of unmistakable terror, "Not there! not there!" My hand fell away from the knob but I had already turned it, and the door flew open, disclosing merely another smaller schoolroom having its entry and entrance at the back of the building. Considering her cry of alarm I fully expected to have some kind of wild animal spring out. As it was, the room seemed ordinary enough; I turned to her for an explanation of her outcry. She was standing with her back towards me and made no reply. Then I asked if this smaller schoolroom also were not used; she answered in a lifeless tone, without turning her face, that the room had not been used for some years, but that she believed it was needed again this summer on account of a larger number of primary pupils. I found the broom and swept up the debris on the floor. She didn't offer to help me, but remained at the window looking out into the shadowy yard.

Again her sad silence settled down upon me, and as we walked away from the schoolhouse it became so oppressive that I cast wildly about for some remark which should be so commonplace that the answer would not affect her as my questions had hitherto. We were travelling the dusty road, when I noticed a path in the bordering fields, together with a place where some boards made a footpath across a meadow brook. That seemed usual enough. I said: "Couldn't we have gone home through the fields? Isn't it shorter than coming this way?"

For a scarcely perceptible period she hesitated. Then, in a little breathless voice, answered, "Yes, but I'm afraid of snakes," and when I looked at her she did look so frightened at the mere mention of them that I said no more on the subject of the shorter

way. We walked on again in silence. Privately, however, I determined to try that path the very next morning, and when, upon nearing the house, I discovered that the footpath could be reached from their very grove by going across the road, I was so delighted that only the extraordinary way in which Mrs. Simmons had acted during the afternoon kept me from exclaiming aloud.

That evening at supper Mr. Simmons proved to be a very talkative, sociable man, and his wife brightened up in his presence so that we were having quite a merry time when the wheels of a carriage were heard outside, and Mr. Simmons came back from the door with a note which he handed to his wife. With a nod to me, she read, then, turning, said apologetically, "The other teacher, a Miss Knight," referring to the note, "is thrown upon our hospitality for a few days. The doctor has pronounced measles at the Dunbars', where she was to be accommodated, and there is no time to-night to find another place for her. Would you mind taking her in with you for a day or two? Your room is so small that I hate to ask it, but I have no other that could be prepared at such short notice."

I did mind taking in a strange person to sleep with me, particularly after the unusually nervous state in which Mrs. Simmons had been all the afternoon, but, on the same account, I couldn't be horrid enough to object, and so I said a hesitating "Yes," and in a few minutes Miss Knight came in to tea. Then I was sure that I never would have consented to take her to room with me had I seen her beforehand. She seemed at once a most charming and most peculiar person — charming in her person, peculiar in manners. I remember thinking instantly that her name belied her oddly. She might better have inherited Day, for she was tall, slim, fair, with quantities of yellow hair and a beautiful fair complexion, almost too fair, for in the lamplight it was an unearthly pallor. Perhaps, though, it was caused by fatigue. At any rate she seemed too tired to eat, answered in monosyllables when questioned about her journey, and sat staring across the table at a picture over the mantel, instead of rising when she had finished a pretence of a meal. Then, as she finally rose to leave the room, she stepped to look yet more closely at the picture, which had seemed to me a poor amateurish-looking water-color,

and began to speak of the beauty of the surrounding country. For five minutes or more she talked more rapturously of woods, fields, flowers, and out-of-door life than I had ever before heard one even lecture from a platform. Her face lighted, her whole figure became energetic, she spoke rapidly, fluently, even gestured to illustrate her points. I saw Mr. Simmons glance at his wife as she stood with half-parted lips, and a puzzled, concerned, and not altogether pleased expression flashed across his pleasant countenance. But my unexpected room-mate finished as suddenly as she had begun, and when I led the way to the room we were to share, she spoke not one word on the way. Her silence seemed so inexplicable after so unexpected an outburst that I seized the first opportunity to go down-stairs, intending to finish the evening with a book in the sitting-room where Mr. Simmons sat reading the newspaper while his wife read a magazine.

I was on tiptoe with a desire to make some remark about my odd situation and once I caught Mr. Simmons looking at me over the top of the paper. I was sure his lips opened as if to speak, but after a covert glance at his wife he lowered his eyes and went on reading, without making any remark. Then, after a few minutes more, when I noticed that although Mrs. Simmons appeared to be reading her magazine, she had not once turned a page, but sat holding it in hands so unsteady that the book trembled, I naturally concluded that there had been some discussion which my entrance had interrupted. The newspaper and book were subterfuges to cover a serious matter. Ordinarily, I would have retired immediately from so tense an atmosphere, but the thought of that strange, pale, silent girl in my room annoyed me so that I determined at all odds to wait until she had gone to bed before returning.

My hopes were disappointed. When I entered the room Miss Knight was all dressed for sleep, but she was not in bed. She stood at the mirror combing her hair.

I had meant to speak no word to her until she had addressed some kind of remark to me, but at the sight of her wonderful yellow hair, as it streamed uncoiled nearly to the floor, I was astonished into an exclamation of admiration. That ejaculation proved to be a key, for she began to talk about her hair, how it

had grown rapidly since an illness many years before, how she cared for it, how its color had been admired ever since she could remember, concluding with, "No child in the place ever had hair like Mrs. Simmons' little girl."

"Mrs. Simmons' little girl!" cried I, "where is she?"

"The one who was to sit on the other side of you at the table," answered she, seeming not to notice my astonishment. "Between you and her father. Did she not make room for me? Was there not a place prepared?"

I confess that that answer made a little chill run up and down my back. She talked so naturally of a child when I was positive that no one was at the side of the table to which she referred. Indeed, I had noticed the extra plate when first we sat down to supper, and wondered that Mrs. Simmons was preparing to lay another when Miss Knight had cut short her preparations by slipping into the chair already placed. Now I remembered that Mrs. Simmons had made an ineffectual movement as if to prevent her, then nervously clasping and unclasping her hands had hurriedly left the room to reappear with some dish or other that she placed upon the table with hands that trembled visibly. I had laid her agitation to her evident nervous condition, but now — now — what was I to think? For a full moment I could not collect my thoughts for another question; meanwhile my strange companion turned and went on combing her hair.

When I *could* think rationally I decided to wait until morning, when I would take the first opportunity to ask or look for the child, though I couldn't understand any of it, and gradually, as I threw off the queer feeling that had overcome me, I made up my mind that very likely Miss Knight was tired, and since she was a teacher and was used to seeing children about, she had imagined that there was one there.

All the time I was preparing for bed she went on combing her hair. It was truly an unusual sight to see the light flash on the long strands as they fell away from the comb, whirling about her, making a wonderful golden rim about her pale face and falling like a golden veil around her fragile figure. I could have enjoyed the sight had it not been for our puzzling conversation and a peculiar manner that she had — of not seeming to see what her

eyes rested upon. I had noticed it when she was talking in the dining-room; so now she looked into the glass, yet she seemed not to see her image; there was a queer, impersonal expression on her face; such a one as a person has who is straining every faculty to help out a recollection.

I supposed that I was unstrung from the prospect of new and untried work on the morrow. Anyway, that was the way I explained my nervousness, for she combed that yellow hair, and combed, and combed, until long after I was in bed and lay watching her, until it seemed as if I could not bear it another minute without screaming. But just at the minute when I was afraid I should have to put my head under the clothes or cry out, she braided it loosely with three or four nervous twitches, blew out the lamp with one whiff and threw herself lightly upon the bed beside me. I was so relieved that with a thankful sigh and a brief good night I turned over and prepared to sleep.

I couldn't tell afterwards whether I had slept any time or not, although it couldn't have been long enough for me to get into a deep sleep — I have always been a heavy sleeper and hard to awaken — when I was startled by the sensation that there was some one moving in the room. Involuntarily I sat up and strained my eyes into the darkness. In a second I heard the key turn in the lock and then the key gently withdrawn. My heart stood still. The next second I made out a tall, white figure coming from the door, and the same nervous throwing of her body upon the bed showed me it was Miss Knight.

"Did you lock the door?" I asked.

No answer.

"Perhaps she walks in her sleep," thought I.

Louder, "Did you lock the door, Miss Knight?"

A pause. Then, "Yes," in a low tone.

"Why?"

No answer.

It was so much easier to question her in the dark than when she stared with that impersonal look that I persisted. Besides I was annoyed and did not stop to think how inhospitable I must appear.

"Why have you locked the door?"

No answer.

Mrs. Simmons' unaccountable manner of the afternoon, the unusual manner of my room-mate, the puzzling conversation about the child, all ran through my mind — in fact, all the stories that I had ever heard or read about unbalanced minds took possession of my faculties — but I managed to steady my voice enough to say calmly, "Tell me, do you fear anything in this house?"

Then she laughed, a low, light ripple, that robbed the words which followed of any sinister meaning: "I feel at home — in my own house; but she might come in; I must not be touched; I must give no occasion."

The laugh had reassured me so, together with the light tone that accompanied it, that I felt ashamed of my brusque questioning. With a muttered "Pardon me," I turned again for sleep. Then the thought of what was meant by some one's coming in and not being touched startled me anew. But there seemed no way to open the question; she had laughed at my fears, and so, after an hour or so of restless tossing, during which time she did not offer to speak, although I felt her awake, I gradually fell asleep.

When I woke again it was broad daylight. Miss Knight was combing her hair. On first waking it seemed to me that she had been combing her hair all night, and yet not she, but a little girl who went in and out of the locked door. My eyes flew to the door; there was the key; I could almost believe that I had dreamed of its being withdrawn at all.

I intended to make an inquiry about Mrs. Simmons' little girl the next remark after my good morning to our hostess, and I carried out my intention, but as soon as the words were out of my mouth, an accident happened that took up our attention so completely that I did not notice until several hours afterwards that I had received no reply.

Mrs. Simmons was just setting the coffee-pot down and her hand must have slipped, for the pot tipped forward, upsetting its entire contents upon the snowy cloth. We all jumped to our feet to escape a scalding, but Mrs. Simmons, who cried out, as if in pain, and then fainted, falling full length upon the floor.

While we were clearing up the table as best we could, Mr.

Simmons carried his wife into an adjoining room, putting aside our proffers of help, and, by the time we had eaten what breakfast we could get from the table, he reappeared to tell us that no doubt his wife would recover before noon, that he would see that we had a lunch sent to us at school, as the noon recess was short and it would be too far to come home on a warm day.

Miss Knight took naturally to the shorter walk through the fields to the schoolhouse, even going ahead, quite shaming my shadow of Mrs. Simmons' fear of snakes. I had expected to get her to give me some suggestions about opening school, but she monopolized the time making acquaintance with every flower and bird on the way, even stopping long enough at the brook to follow its meanderings a few steps.

She gathered her little flock in the small room that had been unused so long, and, at intervals during my busy day, I wondered at the silence that prevailed in the adjoining room. However, there was so much for me to do in a hundred ways that the long afternoon session had ended and the pupils had made a noisy exit a full hour before I thought of my teaching companion.

Then, as I sat at the old-fashioned desk, enjoying the quiet that stole in through the open windows from the still June sunset, she interrupted my reverie by appearing suddenly, a pale figure, lighting up the dusky rectangle made by the opened door between the schoolrooms, with the question, "Have you seen her hat?"

"Whose hat?" I asked.

"Mrs. Simmons' little girl's."

"I haven't seen Mrs. Simmons' little girl yet," I answered shortly, "let alone her hat."

"She must have lost it on the way home," replied Miss Knight, closing the door again as suddenly and as silently as she had opened it.

I was annoyed at her persistency. This was now the third time within twenty-four hours that she had spoken of something that I didn't understand.

"I don't believe Mrs. Simmons has any little girl," I said half aloud.

The last word was not out of my mouth when, "Please, I can't

find my hat, and I've looked everywhere," came a tiny, childish voice at my right hand.

There stood a perfect little miniature of a girl, soft light curls clustering short about a tiny troubled face, as she raised an appealing little bare arm in the school manner.

"You must have lost it on the way home," echoed I, without any conscious effort.

"I've looked everywhere." The troubled voice trailed off into the gathering shadows of the trees outside as she backed out of the door and a sudden rush of cool air closed it in front of her.

"She's too little to go home alone at this hour; I'll go along with her and help her look for her hat," thought I, hastening to lock my desk and preparing to follow her. I became conscious of what seemed the sudden fall of night and stepped to the door to call Miss Knight. Her room was empty and dark, with drawn curtains and closed entrance.

"She must have gone out the back door while I was speaking with the child." I hurriedly locked my door and started in the direction of the brookside path. No child was in sight; neither was Miss Knight. With the idea of overtaking one, or perhaps both, at the brook crossing, I made my way along the path, and, as I came in sight of the brook, was delighted to see, half buried in the long grass, a child's straw hat, with long pink streamers entangled in the grass stems. I stooped to pick up the hat. My fingers grasped only the sharp edges of the coarse sedges.

As if the rough contact jarred a dull mind to consciousness, cleared a dimmed sight, the picture of the child as she had stood in the schoolroom door flashed across my mind's eye, and I remembered that as she stood *facing* me I could see plainly a long braid of yellow hair, tied with a pink ribbon, hanging at her back.

I screamed; I ran; I am sure that had any person met me between that brook and the Simmonses', the townspeople would have had ample reason for dispensing with my services as a teacher.

As it was, I had the good fortune in my mad flight to meet Mr. Simmons, or rather, he was waiting for me in the grove of pines. I caught him with shaking fingers, and gasped out my story. He led me to a seat among the trees, and, when I

had become somewhat calm, he explained or tried to explain matters.

He said that he had waited to intercept me in order to caution me about questioning Mrs. Simmons about their little girl, for, as it seemed, they had had a child, and when, many years before, his wife had been a teacher of the younger pupils there in the small schoolroom, her own little girl, a child of five years, was one of the pupils; that yesterday had been a sad anniversary for them, for on that day, twenty years ago, the little girl had strangely disappeared. She had started home from school in advance of her mother, taking the field path. She was passionately fond of flowers, and had laughingly said that she was going to gather enough wild flowers that afternoon to fill all the vases in the world. Her mother, coming afterwards, found the child's hat by the brook, and, thinking that she had dropped it in her play, went on to the house carrying it. The child was not there. They had searched far and near, beginning with the neighborhood, through the town, county, and even into distant States, but she was not to be found. She had disappeared, completely and forever, that June day.

It had been many years before the fruitless search was entirely given up; then his wife had had a fever and upon her recovery had never mentioned the child's name. He knew, however, that she still remembered, because the child's place had always been laid at the table, and until I had stepped the day before into her little room, no one had entered it. He begged me, now that he had explained about the child, not to question his wife about so harrowing a memory; that, added to the painful recollections of the day, Mrs. Simmons had been nearly prostrated by the unexpected entrance of Miss Knight, who resembled their little girl so much in feature and hair that her presence in the house had been a shock to both of them.

Wonderingly I assured him that I never should have known there ever had been a child in the house had it not been for Miss Knight, and I recounted to him her queer behavior of the previous night. He shook his head and went into the house to find and question her. She was not there. She did not come to supper. She did not come during the evening.

We waited and watched. Finally, messages were sent about the town. One sent to the Dunbars' brought back the answer that the new primary teacher, a Miss Lane, was there, having arrived that night, being delayed a day on account of illness at home; that there was no case of measles at the Dunbars'; that they had sent no teacher to us the night before. They had supposed that the grammar teacher would have charge of the smaller pupils for that day.

We sat until long after midnight talking over the peculiar events of the last twenty-four hours — and ended where we began. Mrs. Simmons showed me a beautiful picture of her little girl, Lavinia, and it was the identical child that had spoken to me in my schoolroom. She showed me the hat. It was the one I had failed to grasp at the brookside.

We discussed the unusual resemblance between Miss Knight and the lost child and it transpired that little Lavinia Simmons had been, oddly enough, fond of having her hair combed; that sometimes it was the only way that she could be quieted when tired or ill.

I moved into another room in the house and finished my ten weeks of teaching, but every day I went home from school before sundown and I could not bring myself to take the field path.

Our self-invited guest that anniversary night? We could find no trace of her. The man who drove her to the Simmonses' house that night could not be identified. The note she brought could not be found. But it was discovered that she had done no ordinary school work that day. She had kept the children quiet and interested by talking to them of woods, fields, and flowers, and she had told them many stories — among them being that of the strange disappearance of little Lavinia Simmons.

Cotton for Cotton.*

BY LORENA M. PAGE.

HIRAM AUSTIN cultivated his farm, a mile out of town, and lived for years in country quiet. Then the fair grounds came, and the rows of sheds and boarded-up buildings sprung up, like a batch of mushrooms, on the next section to him. Once a year, when the country-side flocked to the County Fair, the old man could sit by his own door and take in many of the sights — including the last quarter-stretch of the race track. Hiram Austin was a great lover of horse-flesh, and, although a deacon of the church — and a most model deacon at that — he soon developed a full appreciation of a good race. It had always been against his principles to go to such a place, but when the race came to him — well, that was different.

The old man always happened, of an afternoon when a race was coming off, to sit in the shade with his newspaper. At such times, Mary, his only child, would have some sewing, needing immediate attention and, taking a place just behind her father, inside the doorway, she would watch with much amusement her father's covert glances over the paper as the horses neared the bend, then his craning neck, and later the dropping of the "Weekly Record" altogether as the clatter of hoofs drew near and they swept past to the finish. If the flying rush proved too exciting, she often forgot her sewing, her father, and everything but the race till it had passed; when she would hastily resume her chair and work, for, at this stage of the comedy, the old deacon was sure to look around either to see if he had been discovered, or to chide her if her eyes had been tempted to follow the wicked antics of the turf.

There were a half-dozen colts in the deacon's field which bordered on the race track, among them a light gray gelding, nearly

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white, with as fine a head as a horse ever carried, as handsome a pair of eyes as ever looked through a bridle, legs sound and clean, and a body smooth, long and round. The racers always affected him strangely, too; when he caught the noise of rushing hoofs, and saw the bunch round the bend, he would throw up his head, sniff the air like a war-horse inhaling the smoke of battle, and, as the contestants came up, he would wheel and dash beside them without a break, the fence between him and the track. He would follow neck and neck till the crowd on the grand stand let out its yell as the racers on the course came into the home-stretch. Then the gray gelding would stop, frightened by the din and, excited and triumphant, he would join the sober companions he had quitted.

After such performances of the colt, Hiram Austin would always sit by his door till long after the track was clear, and there would be a restless movement of the hands and longing glances toward the grand stand, then into the field where Cotton, the gray gelding, had settled to grazing quietly with his companions.

"No use talking, he's a racer;" the deacon would soliloquize, "it's either bred in him somehow, or he's learned the trick by living alongside the track. I never see his movements but I am tempted — I feel that I would give all I possess to hold the ribbons — just once — over his back, and drive him to the finish right in the thick of the rush. He'll tempt me till I fall from grace if I don't sell him. Dave Hoyt wants him, and if I keep my religion, he'll have to go."

. . . . . .

Two years had passed since Cotton frisked in the deacon's field. He had been sold to David Hoyt, who had been training him ever since — training him for the track at that — and it was this fact that had brought the first real sorrow into Mary Austin's life, for her father said he hadn't any idea of having for a son-in-law a fellow who spent the most part of his time behind a race-horse.

The people again surged in for miles around; the time had come for the exhibition of the finest fruit, the sleekest cattle, the fattest hogs, the fancy poultry, canned sweets, pieced bed-quilts, and — the races. As the hour for the latter drew near, Mary was restless and nervous. Would her father sit by the door with his

paper, to give her the chance to sew in the doorway, or must she creep up-stairs to the little gabled window where she could catch but a fleeting glance at the track? How she longed to go to the big barn down near the grand stand and take it all in. She must see this race, for Cotton was entered for the first time, and David was to drive him.

The crowd, in the grand stand and lining the track, called for the race to begin, as the clouds were piling up and there was every indication of a sudden shower; they did not propose to lose the most exciting part of the day's entertainment.

Some of the horses were already upon the track, jogging leisurely around, and the band, composed of boys from the district, took their places. At last, Mary saw the silver-gray of Cotton's coat as David drove him upon the course, and her heart bounded. There were no four-in-hand drags — but a long row of country vehicles; no pool-selling — but some honest dollars passing from one horny hand to another; no brightly-painted sulkies with spider-like wheels — but everyone driving any sort of a wheeler that suited his fancy; no drivers in silk jackets and caps to match —all appearing in a costume of his own selection; and yet, at the last moment, after the judges had mounted their rude platform, there appeared upon the scene a vivid exception to the homely lot. The horse was black, the sulky a pale yellow, spindley thing that looked to the country people like a grand-daddy-long-legs sporting among a lot of buzzing horse-flies, and the driver upon it wore orange and black — could they believe their eyes? — satin! Hiram Austin came around the corner of his house just as this last turn-out flashed by to turn at his very door back toward the pole where the racers were collecting. He knew in an instant that this was Judge Howard's new outfit, just arrived from New York. He bit his lip and clenched his hardened hand, without knowing it; he had many causes for disliking Judge Howard, not the least of which was that old mortgage when times were hard, and the way he had been threatened and crowded till it was lifted. But what did it matter that Judge Howard's new racer looked fit to out-do any other horse on the track? What did it matter if the driver wore satin and waxed his moustache till it bristled in a way the deacon had never seen? What did a

horse race matter, anyhow? Horse races were against his principles.

David jogged past behind the silver-gray, and the loose kerchief about his neck just matched the sewing waved behind the old man's back. The latter's face was buried in his newspaper, and he did not see it. The bunch collected, the gong sounded, and the race was on. A little bay mare took the lead, the big black following, Cotton a close third, the others just behind. Down to the half-mile post the bay mare led, from there to the three-quarter mark the big black began to close on her, Cotton keeping his position with him. The black gained, and passed the bay mare at the last quarter, Cotton trailing to this point. Then the silver-gray began to overhaul him — seeming to strike a two-minute gait. The others lost steadily from this point, the pace being too stiff for them.

Hiram Austin bounded to his feet and, not being able to see it all, clambered into his chair. They rounded the bend and fairly flew past the farm-house, neck and neck now, toward the finish, the little bay holding third place two lengths behind. The crowd set up a howl, the band broke out in triumphant discord, and, true to his old trick when he heard the racket, Cotton broke and bolted for the bushes.

"Put him to it!" yelled the deacon, forgetful of all but the race. "Hold him steady!"

The Judge's black went under the wire, an easy winner, the little bay mare second.

Hiram Austin dropped into his chair, and mopped his head with the crumpled newspaper. "I thought Dave Hoyt knew how to drive," he blurted out, looking back at Mary, who was sewing bravely, though her hands trembled.

A few drops descended, followed by a steady downpour, the second heat was delayed, and finally called off, for it looked as if it had settled down for a long rain. The thunder rumbled, a sharp flash cut the darkening sky, and the storm, that had been threatening, broke.

It was announced from the judge's stand that the race would have to be postponed till the following day, and one said to another, as disappointed, wet, and draggled, they hurried to their

conveyances, that they would be sure to come to the finish, for there would be doings, for Cotton, with all his country-side reputation, had a good horse to beat. Then, too, the hard-earned dollars against Judge Howard's full purse must be looked after.

David was worried, and did not get to sleep till late. It seemed to him that he had hardly dropped off when he was awakened by a shower of small stones against his window. He looked out to see Mary below.

"David," she said, breathlessly, "they have brought Judge Howard's horse on to the track and are going to drive him."

David was soon on the ground beside her, and, hand in hand, they hurried through the darkness toward the race course. They were none too soon, for even as they crept into the shadow of the grand stand they heard Judge Howard say "go" and David had his time-watch ready. The track was only a trifle soft, the rain having proved of short duration.

"They must be worried over Cotton," Mary whispered; "and they are getting the black used to the track."

"I'm worried over Cotton too, Mary," David whispered back. "I'm afraid I can't drive him to a finish when the crowd lets loose; he is always nervous over a racket, and he bolted today in spite of me. I never thought till then of how he used to do that very thing when he was a colt in the field there. A horse, if he has been in the habit of doing a certain thing in a certain place, is almost sure to do it again in the same spot."

Now, by the sound, the black was nearing the last quarter, then closer, faster and louder, and into the home-stretch and under the wire. David's watch snapped; it was too dark out here to make out the time, but in his heart he felt that Cotton was the black's equal — if he could only hold him to his work.

"He's a better horse than I expected to run across out here," the jockey was saying, "but his bolting will be his finish."

"Then we're sure to do him up," said Judge Howard, excitedly.

"If the crowd don't rattle him with their yells, I'll make a racket under his nose that will set him off," the jockey replied.

"We must win, I've staked too much on the black to afford to lose; and there's a good pile to win. Among the rest, all that Dave Hoyt is worth is up on that Cotton plug."

Mary was standing in a deep study, and only caught the last of what Judge Howard was saying.

"I have it," she exclaimed, under her breath.

"Have what?" whispered David, in surprise.

"Why, the way to drive Cotton to a sure finish," and, reaching up, she whispered the secret in his ear as if fearful that it might be overheard. He was mystified for a second, and then he laughed softly, and they shook hands like good comrades congratulating one another.

The next morning, while Mary got the breakfast, she sang like a robin on a topmost bough at sunset.

"David Hoyt is going to get beat today," her father said, just as he might have told her, "Sing before breakfast, cry before night." "There's not a better horse from New York, or anywhere else, than Cotton is, but it will take a better driver than Dave Hoyt, with all of his jockeying, to bring him to the wire."

Mary held her peace, but while her lips stopped their music, her heart sang on.

The grand stand was packed long before the usual time; the band came early, and, in honor of the local favorite, played "Way Down South, in the Land of Cotton," over and over again; women were dressed in their gayest calicoes; men wore their Sunday clothes and an anxious expression, for the speed of the new-comer had spread and been magnified till Maud S. in her palmiest days would never have been able to keep the dust he kicked up in sight.

The field of home horses that had been so greatly distanced the day before did not put in an appearance; but, prompt to the dot, the big black, the little bay mare, and Cotton were upon the track. The bell sounded the summons to make ready for the first heat — the second rather, the first having been won by the Judge's big black the previous day. A general buzz of excitement pervaded the assemblage — and such an assemblage had never been seen before on the grounds.

The bell sounded the final summons; the horses were lined up; the "go" was called; and the three were away together. At the quarter-pole the black and Cotton were still abreast, as if working in double harness. Going down the back-stretch the black gained half a length, the little bay trailing close behind. At the half-

mile the black and the gray set sail, the bay falling slightly behind. When they made the last turn, past the house and into the home-stretch, Cotton was nearly nose and nose with the black, but, as he approached the danger-spot of the day before, he made a wobble and the black showed further in front. Cotton, instantly recovering, cut loose, and, in the face of the cheering crowd, the "Hail, Columbia" of the band, the yells of the jockey at his wheel, he went on, true as an arrow.

Hiram Austin had not put in an appearance; Mary, elated with excitement, had cheered her level best; Cotton had faced the commotion and the echoing shouts from hundreds of throats — her scheme had worked. But had he won? It had looked from the farm-house door as if Cotton and the black had gone under the pole eyelash to eyelash. If she could only find some place where she could see it all from start to finish. Then she thought of the old barn down near the grand stand. From there she could see the whole track, and be sure of the winner. Her father was not there to know about it, and, as quick as thought, she took her sun-bonnet from its peg, and fairly flew across the pasture. The old building was on a slight eminence, the front door commanded a view of the back part of the track, from a side window she could see the start and finish. She had hardly reached her point of vantage and regained her breath, when the third heat was called.

In starting, each of the three seemed determined to get away first. The judges threatened, scolded, and called them back several times; Mary thought the "go" would never be given. There was a general hubbub, but Cotton was as quiet and obedient as if never a sound broke the silence. When the word rang out, there was a scrimmage, in which the little bay gained the lead, Cotton trailing, the black beside him. In this position they swung on past the quarter-pole. Now the black began out-trotting the gray. As they bore down on the half-mile mark, slowly, slowly, he forged ahead. Past the half-mile, daylight could be seen between them, and the black was creeping past the side of the bay, Cotton keeping his pace, trailing the black a length behind. Mary darted from the window to the door, for they had passed beyond her range of vision. There was a mad tumble in the hayloft overhead as some one rolled from the piled-up hay under the window

in one gable, then a scramble as he struggled to climb in wild haste to the window in the opposite end. The third quarter, and the black is still leading, two full lengths showing now between him and the gray, the bay at the gray's wheel. "Let him out!" yelled an excited voice overhead that sounded strangely familiar.

Then they straightened around the bend and cut loose at a rate of speed never before witnessed on the track. David seemed to wake up for the first time, and to begin driving the silver-gray in dead earnest. "Put on your war-paint, David!" rang out from above. Slowly, slowly, Cotton gained upon the flying black. He seemed to stretch to twice his ordinary length and shorten to half his usual height. On, on they came into the home stretch. Mary rushed back to her window, the whirlwind in the hay-loft was repeated. Judge Howard was standing near the barn beside the track. "Run over him!" came in half-smothered tones from the window in the gable.

As the black and gray flew past the Judge, neck and neck, he emptied his six-shooter into the air. The little bay, half-a-dozen lengths behind, broke as the reports rang out, the jockey at Cotton's wheel yelled till hoarse, the crowd shouted like mad, the band started three tunes at once, but Cotton, inch by inch, sailed ahead.

"Go it, Davey!" came from the loft; "You're the lad! Hold him to it!" Mary waved her bonnet, and gave one triumphant hurrah as Cotton went under the wire, a nose ahead!

"I knew he could do it!" shouted Hiram Austin, dropping down from the loft, and bringing down a small hay-stack with him.

"Who, Cotton?" asked Mary, too happy to be afraid.

"No, Davey;" was the disgusted reply. "I always knew the horse was all right, but it took Davey to make him face the music and win the two heats running."

She opened her lips to speak, then wisely closed them again. Let David have the honor. She had nearly told her father that she had advised cotton plugs for Cotton's ears.

For His Love's Sake.*

BY JAMES BUCKHAM.

THEY were building a branch railroad up the Little Otter valley, and the hazy August air was vexed with the clatter of pick and shovel, the rumble of dump-cars, the creak of derricks, and an occasional heavy blast that shook heaven and earth like a far-resounding thunder-clap. These were unwonted activities for that quiet and remote country valley, and its scattered inhabitants watched them with undisguised excitement and wonder. Haying and harvesting were now nearly finished on the upland farms, and, daily, vehicles filled with entire families came, picnic-wise, to the scene of operations, the people all in their Sunday best, and gay of spirits over their novel holiday. Intermingled with the family carryalls were also smart buggies, built for two, in which country lovers and sweethearts packed their bliss for a long day's happy outing.

From the eastward over the long ridge between Little Otter and Big Otter valleys, toiled heavy wagons, carrying supplies from the nearest railroad station for the gangs of workmen. These supplies were mostly provisions and other necessaries for the camps. But occasionally a wagon came along, covered with a dark-colored tarpaulin, carefully lashed down at sides and ends. Those who knew the signs whispered, "There goes a load of dynamite!" and every one breathed easier when it had passed out of sight.

On a certain Saturday afternoon, breathless and hot, one of these tarpaulin-covered wagons reached the top of the ridge between Big Otter and Little Otter valleys, and the driver pulled up his team to rest; for going down the slope was almost as hard as coming up, with the heavy load, in spite of brakes, pushing steadily on the pole. All the way down that long hill, dazzling with its

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white dust, the stones had been carefully picked out of the road, lest a jolt should set free the pent-up demon of destruction under the tarpaulin. Yet the driver always paused on the ridge — not only to rest his horses, but because he dreaded that long down-grade, on top of his two tons of dynamite.

"What would you do if anything should give way?" asked a voice behind him, suddenly, this blazing August afternoon. The driver started, and turned on his seat. A young man, with a rifle over his shoulder and a string of gray squirrels dangling from his belt, was peering under the great wagon. He had come silently out of the woods near by, and his question was like the unexpected crack of a gun on the still air.

"Wal," replied the driver, recovering his self-possession and shifting his quid of tobacco to the opposite cheek, "I reckon I'd do about the same thing you would — I'd jump."

"I wouldn't jump," retorted the young countryman; "that is, not as things are with me now. I shouldn't care much if I went up with the outfit."

"Perhaps *you* wouldn't," replied the other, quietly, "but I would. I've got a wife and two kids."

The young man with the rifle sighed heavily, but held his peace.

"Doesn't that make a difference?" urged the driver.

"Yes — it makes a difference," muttered the other. He walked to the edge of the road and sat down on the bank, opposite the man on the wagon. "Another fellow's got my girl," he said, heavily. "You don't know anything about that. You can't. A man doesn't care much about himself, or anything else, after that. There's just one thing he *does* care for — he'd like to open up the hot place a little sooner for the man that did it."

The driver nodded his head. "I guess you're about right," he said. "I don't blame you a bit. Wal, it's time for me to be goin' along. I'm sorry for you — that's a fact." He lightened the brake-pressure, chirruped to his horses, and the wagon-load of dynamite started down the hill.

The young man with the rifle still sat looking down the road. Suddenly he started, and half rose from the bank. A light buggy came whirling into the main highway from a branch road, near the foot of the hill. "It's his rig, by God!" hissed the jilted lover.

"Going to get her, and take her over to see the railroad-building. And she's expecting him and waiting for him, likely, dressed in that white —"

The young man choked, and buried his face in his hands. All at once, a terrible cry smote on his ears. He jumped up and saw, first, a great cloud of dust where the load of dynamite had been crawling down the hill. Then a flying figure emerged from the dust-cloud, like a man pitched out of a window. It sprawled face downward by the roadside, where it lay still for a moment, then stirred, sat up, and looked wildly down the hill.

Something had broken, and the load of dynamite was running wild down the hill, at the heels of two frenzied horses. In front of it was the successful lover in his buggy. There was no chance for him to turn out on either side of the road, and there was no branch road for miles ahead. The horse between the buggy-shafts was doing his best — but what is a single horse in his senses to a pair of runaways? In less than a minute there must be a collision — and then —

The young man with the rifle sat down again on the bank. He laid his rifle in the grass, folded his arms as if he were hugging himself, and smiled grimly. Then he fastened his eyes with a great hunger of longing on the lessening distance between the two teams.

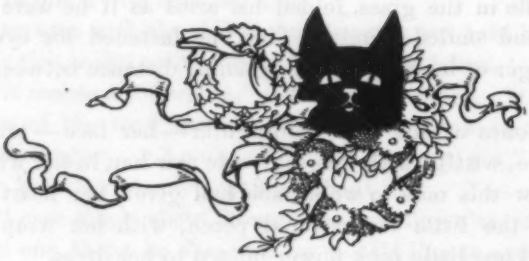
All at once a face rose before him — her face — tender with happy love, wistful with longing. He saw her, in her white dress, waiting for this man to whom she had given her heart — sitting there on the little vine-covered porch, with her wrap over her knees, and one little pink flower pinned to her dress.

Then he snatched his rifle out of the grass, raised the sight to the last notch, and knelt in the white road, with elbow on knee and fore-stock gripped firmly in his left hand. His nerves were as steady as threads of steel. What he was going to do was for *her* sake!

Puff — a little jet of smoke out of the rifle-barrel, away up there on the shimmering hill. A brief space of time, in which a bird could scarcely have drawn breath — and then flying horses, wagon, black tarpaulin, all vanished together, as if at the wave of a magician's wand. A dense cloud of smoke, dust, earth and powdered

fragments of all things sprang up against the blue of heaven, and a chasm, as if to the very bowels of the earth, yawned in the white road. A bullet had crashed through the cases of dynamite!

The young rifleman shaded his eyes, until he saw his rival emerge from his overturned buggy, beyond the wreck, and kneel on the neck of his struggling horse, while he hurriedly unbuckled the harness. Then he who had fired that wonderful shot for his Love's sake turned swiftly again into the woods; and the sun shone down on the white road, and the birds lifted up once more their everyday songs, as if nothing had happened.



Prisoners in the Tower.*

BY KATHARINE TYNAN.

SHE had something better than beauty, had it still, despite the facts that she would never see thirty again and had been a waif and stray in the world these half-dozen years. Her nose was outside all canons of beauty, her mouth was too large, her arms were too long. She had fair hair, of a peculiar tinge — there was something of green in it, a wavering gray-green that had a dull lustre in its long, sweeping waves and ripples. Her eyes were absolutely beautiful — blue, large, with a mysterious light in them — and they were fringed with plentiful dark lashes. Her teeth were small and milky as a child's, and her lips were red. Her complexion, though fair and rosy, was nothing to speak of. But her grace was something impossible to explain. You saw it best when she was running or active. Her movements were like those of some free creature of the forest.

The man in the tower first caught sight of her running before the storm, with her head down. She might have been Atalanta.

She had come up from the village among the pines to this high hill-top, watching the storm in the distance, where it sprang and crackled along the distant horizon. She loved storms; the electric fluid set her blood tingling and her heart beating high. Only for the dog at her heels she would have stood out on the high hill-top bareheaded, while the chains of the lightning swung from the greenish heaven to the still and perturbed earth, and the thunder tore and gashed through the menacing clouds. But the dog was frightened. The dog, a little shivering thing, half poodle, half terrier, whimpered with fear.

She caught him up in her arms as she stepped over the

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* The writer of this story received a cash prize of $100 in THE BLACK CAT story contest ending February 26, 1902.

threshold of the tower. "There! there!" she said, as the nurse says it to a fretful baby. There was a rush of flame and a great blaze out of heaven, and the dog yelped as though he were hurt. "Never mind," she said, and laughed, and pushed to the door of the tower, kicking out of her way a stone that had held it back.

She heard a little click of the lock, as the darkness closed about her, and she smelt the sharp sweetness of pine-cones. At the same moment she heard an exclamation, and started, alarmed at the sound of a voice. "Hulloa," it had said. Now it spoke again, very gently. Her hand was fumbling with the door-lock.

"Don't be frightened," said the voice. "I, too, took shelter from the storm. I'm afraid I've startled you. I am so sorry. Allow me."

A hand touched hers at the lock. The voice was a very pleasant one, young, round, musical, the voice of a gentleman.

She stood back in the darkness and left the door to him.

"I must have a light," he said presently, and struck a match. As it flared up she saw a sleek brown head, the end of a neat brown moustache, a brown homespun shoulder. Then the match went out and left them in darkness.

"I'm afraid," said the voice, "that the lock is going to be —obstinate. It seems to be a spring lock and the handle on this side is gone. Pray don't be frightened. I shall have another try."

"It was my fault," she said, caressing the dog. "I'm afraid I pushed away the stone that held it back."

"Never mind. Some one is sure to come. They will come in search of you."

"Of you," she amended.

"Not of me. I am tramping, sleeping at the inns along the road."

"Ah!" her voice had a note of apprehension. "No one will look for me. I am lodging with an old goody in the village below. Nothing that I do would cause her the least surprise. I am the maddest of mortals to her."

"Why, then," he said cheerfully, "we must make up our minds to stay till some one comes up to see the view."

In the darkness she shook her head. It was the very end of the season. The last of the summer visitors had flown and the village had gone to sleep for the winter. A month ago there would have been climbers to the hill-top all day. Now it was a chance if there were one in twenty-four hours.

"I daren't strike any more matches," he went on; "they are too precious. But we shall have a fire. You must not be cold. How lucky it was that some one stacked those pine-cones!"

She heard him down on his knees at a little distance. She knew there was a fire-grate in the little square room. The women who sold ginger-beer and oranges and chocolates and cups of tea to the visitors in the height of the summer season used to use it.

He lit the fire, after one or two failures, and the resinous cones flamed up like so many torches. The warmth was very welcome. She was shivering in her thin frock. There was no one who cared whether she lived or died, and she was habitually reckless of her health. She stood stretching her hands to the flame. Her hair, ruffled by the storm outside, stood out about her head live with electricity. Her eyes were shining with the storm whose lightning ran through her veins. Even this misadventure had not power to depress her.

"You are cold," he said, looking at her with a kind pity. She saw now that he was a straight, clean-looking young man, with eyes like brown velvet, and a quick, alert smile.

"A little," she replied. "I ran out bareheaded and without a cloak when I saw the storm coming up. I wanted to see it from this point."

"Presently you shall make your way to the top of the tower if you insist upon it. Now — be as comfortable as you can."

He lifted a knapsack from the corner where he had flung it, and laid it beside her. Then he took off his coat deliberately, his bright eyes asking for pardon as he did it, and folding it laid it upon the knapsack.

"It is the best we can do," he said, smiling at her. "Now I wish I could make you a cup of tea! I have some sandwiches, a flask of sherry, and a small bottle of water."

"I am not hungry," she said, looking away from him. "Better be careful of the things. We may be here some time."

So she knew what he suspected, that they might be prisoners in the tower an indefinite period. He put the thought away from him. His sandwiches and his sherry and water were poor provender for even a few hours. He would not look beyond the few hours.

"To-morrow," he said, "we shall fly a signal of distress from the top of the tower. Some one will see it and come."

She assented. The storm was still roaring outside, rolling on with long reverberations among the hills. He went and inspected the lock by the firelight. Plainly it gave him no help. He came back and flung himself on the ground in front of the fire. The dog crept up to him in an ingratiating way, nestled against him and was not repulsed.

"You must make the best of me," he said, smiling at her, "till to-morrow. To-morrow will soon be here."

They sat there and talked. She had the softest voice in the world. It was low, and came against his ear as warm and soft as her breath. He talked a great deal about travel and books and such matters at first, to give her ease. She had the mind of a poet, though she lacked the concentration to put her thoughts into poems. She was a born artist. Everything about her was curiously artistic. Her cheap pink muslin clothed her with inexplicable grace. A handful of brown leaves at her waist seemed to him the most delightful adornment he had ever seen. She propped her cheek on her hand. He thought the line of the other cheek to her small ear wonderful. Her throat was like milk.

She was still exhilarated by the storm, a little dazed by her strange adventure. He was talking about himself. She found him soothing — kind, gentle, strong. What an awful adventure it would have been with a different kind of man! She had been accustomed all her life to divide people into human beings and brown paper. That was her frivolous way of distinguishing those to whom her human part went out from those with whom she had no point of contact. If she had met this man in a drawing-room she would have known she was going to like him. He was lonely in the world, like herself. Without father and mother. An idle fellow, he called himself, with ineffectual tastes and talents for many things. Why, that was just like herself, who had cared

more for poetry and art and music than any of the hard-working girls who were her fellow students, and had been left behind by them all. She could do exquisite things, but they were ineffectual, somehow — that was the word. She would always be poorest of the poor, taking up things and laying them aside, with no capacity for continued work, though much for continual delight. Ineffectual? Why, they were both ineffectual.

At ten o'clock he brought his sandwich-case and made her eat a sandwich. When she declined to have any more he did not demur. At the sherry and water she shook her head, but finally wetted her lips with it.

"You must save the water," she said, pointing to the dog, who was eager for crumbs.

"Yes," he replied, "How lucky I had not mixed it with the sherry. He would not like it, would you, Scamp?"

He measured the dog a little water in the hollow of his hand, and let him drink from it. Then he said good-night to her.

"You are to do the best you can with my coat and knapsack," he smiled. "I wish I had a better supply."

"And you?"

"I will see what kind of lodgings I can find higher up. If you are frightened in the night, call me; I shall be within hail. As soon as you are ready in the morning I will come and light the fire."

He went, indeed, no further off than the staircase. He found a broad step where the staircase wound round about. High as the tower was above the pine-woods and the wooded country there were dead leaves heaped there. He stretched himself full length upon them, set his back to the wall and fell asleep thinking of his fellow prisoner.

She had no mind for sleep. She was too excited for that. She obediently propped herself up on his knapsack as he had told her to, his waterproof under her, his coat over her. There was something companionable about that coat. It touched her cheek like a human touch. It was warm, like a human contact. She held it to her face as one might hold the hair of a beloved person, and her heart beat faster in the quietness. Why! in all the years since her father died and left her poor and ineffectual, she had never felt so companioned as she did to-night.

She slept towards morning when the fire had died out and the lightning no longer leaped through the long slit above the door of the tower. When she awoke it was broad daylight, and the air of the tower felt damp and clinging. She sprang to her feet and made what toilet she could. She found that the knapsack contained a towel, a piece of soap, and a comb. She washed her face with a few drops of water, the dog who had lain at her feet watching her wistfully.

Then she called her fellow prisoner. He came buoyantly to her call. He was carrying something — a paper bag full of oranges.

"It did not pay to carry them down the mountain, I suppose," he said, joyously. "We shall have oranges for breakfast. And we shall not die of thirst. It is raining cats and dogs. I shall catch enough in my waterproof to keep us going."

After the scanty breakfast they went to the top of the tower. The whole country smoked with rain. They might fly what signals they would that day, but the tower was invisible, wrapped about in its veil of mist.

They looked at each other and smiled. He was thinking that only for her he would have found it insupportable. She waited on the stairs under cover while he arranged his waterproof to hang like a bag between four stones. He must wear his coat in that deluge — she insisted on that.

When he had finished she handed him something with a blush. It was a daintily laced white petticoat.

"The signal," she said, with her eyes lowered.

"Ah, yes, the signal," he replied, not looking at her. "We might as well hang it out in case some one should come this way."

They went down and sat by the fire. At mid-day they finished the last of the sandwiches, sharing them with the dog. Each was wondering silently how long it would be possible to live on oranges. He mentioned to her that a dog had been known to live quite a long time on water, and she assented. The presence of the dumb creature was an added trouble.

"If no one comes to-morrow," she said, "we must drop him over the side of the tower and trust his four feet to bear him scathless. I couldn't endure his hunger."

They talked a great deal that day, and now it was about themselves. It was astonishing how each discovered the history of the past to the other. When the talk flagged he took a little volume of Wordsworth from his pocket and read it to her. But presently they went back to themselves, and found other things to tell. By nightfall they had hardly a secret from each other.

That night he slept on the staircase again. Next morning the country still smoked with rain. They had nothing to eat but oranges, and already her face was pinched and black shadows had come under her lovely eyes. The dog whined and fretted. He followed them when they went to the top of the tower, where the waterproof was full of water and the signal flapped forlornly in the wet wind.

"We will give him his chance," he said, smiling at her, as he took the dog, "I wish I could give you yours as easily."

She thought that she would not have taken it without him, but she said nothing, only watched him as he dropped the dog. Their eyes followed the creature as he fell, turning a somersault in mid-air. He thudded on the turf at the tower-foot, but after lying sprawling a second on his back he got up, shook himself and scampered down the mountain. They looked at each other and laughed, the relief was so great.

That night, when he would have left her, looking back at her wistfully, she recalled him.

"Stay with me," she pleaded. "I am so hungry and I am afraid. What if I were to die in the night alone?"

He came back then and sat down beside her, and drew her head to rest on his shoulder, and presently she fell asleep, his arm supporting her. He did not know if he were in heaven or in hell. The touch of her cheek against his was exquisite, but the first traces of starvation in her face tore at his heart like the claws of the Furies. If he had anything to hew their way out with! But even his razors had been forgotten at the last inn, and the door was of oak, a foot thick, and clamped with iron.

To-morrow, to-morrow they must do something. Unless help came he would try making a rope of their garments long enough to lower her to the ground, or near it.

She sighed in her sleep, and he smelt the perfume of her hair.

Outside the tower an owl hooted. Suddenly, through the slit in the masonry, he caught sight of a star, and his heart leaped up. The rain must be clearing off. Sometimes in these mountains it lasted days, and even weeks.

He held himself rigid, lest he should wake her, but even then he slept. When he awoke, he was stiff with fatigue, but the tower was full of the sun.

Almost at the same moment she awoke and started up.

"Let us go on top of the tower," he said, "and eat the last of the oranges. We shall be set free to-day."

He had almost to carry her up. This morning the signal flowed straight and free. Under them seven counties lay shining, rivers and pools and the windows of houses sparkling silver out of a haze of pearl. Far below them the village chimneys smoked. Farther still they saw the Manor House amidst its flower-beds and fish-ponds, with the dark trees of its park around it.

He still had his arm about her.

"Help will come soon," he whispered, "as soon as people are out in the fields to see our signal. But before it comes I want to tell you that I love you. God brought us here together. I shall never leave you again. We shall be married down there."

He pointed to where a sharp spire clove the pine woods.

She only sighed and turned her face to his like a timid child. She was so glad to have come home. And as he kissed her they saw a group of laborers climbing the hill-side.

The Work of the Unloved Libby.*

BY SUSAN KEATING GLASPELL.

LIBBY ANDERSON hung the dish-cloth on its accustomed nail and stood there surveying it. Then she took the tin pie-pan and covered the crock of yeast, without the active consciousness that there was yeast there. Then she walked to the middle of the floor, and looked around. Oh, yes — the coffee. She took the mill from the cupboard and began twirling it with tremendous force. She had nearly forgotten the coffee, and it would have been the first time in twenty years —it gave her a feeling of approaching danger. She put the mill on the table, and walked to the sitting-room. It was plain from the way she closed the door that she had determined to speak.

"Ma," she asked of the woman who was sitting before the little round stove, "what was it you and Dave were talking about when I came home yesterday afternoon?"

Mrs. Anderson did not stop her knitting, and her mouth closed firmly. "Some business of Dave's."

"Who was the man I met down by the bridge as I was coming home?"

"It might have been anybody at all, and it might have been a friend of Dave's that came out from the city to see him."

"Dave made you promise not to tell me about it, I suppose."

"La, now, Libby, how you do go on; as if there was any great thing to tell."

"What were those papers Dave put in his pocket as I came in?"

"Some things he was showin' me."

"Ma," she asked, quiveringly, "you didn't sign anything, did you?"

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* The writer of this story received a cash prize of $150 in THE BLACK CAT story contest ending February 26, 1902.

"I didn't sign your name to anything," and the needles clashed tartly.

She knew her mother too well to press further. "I just couldn't understand Dave coming here this time of year," she ventured, "and I thought he acted queer."

The old woman was folding her knitting. "I'm going to bed and you'd better come along, too," was her reply.

But Libby did not come. She sat by the little round stove, going all over it for the hundredth time. She did not know just why she distrusted her brother — it might have been because he had such a silky laugh. "All he'd have to do would be to ask for it," she told herself, "the asking would be enough."

She started up to bed, and after she was at the top of the steep stairs remembered she had not bolted the door. She shivered; it was the first time in twenty years she had forgotten. She had only been doing it for twenty years — before that her father had done it. She had been doing a great many things in the last twenty years that her father had done before her, and year after year she had done them in the same way. That was why forgetting the door bothered her.

Libby Anderson did not have a silky laugh — there was nothing silky about her. She was forty, and unredeemably plain, and hopelessly conscientious. She had had "a chance" once, fifteen years before, but had not seen her way clear to leave Ma. In the last year Ma had grown very old-looking and feeble. Libby sometimes wondered how it would be with her after —

A week went by, and although she had twice forgotten to feed the chickens, and had several times let the kettle burn dry, she was beginning to feel more settled in her mind.

Then one day it came.

"I'm going in town this morning, Ma," she said, "and I suppose I'd better go and see about the taxes on that west forty."

"You needn't bother," said Mrs. Anderson, sharply.

Libby had risen from the table, but at this she sat down again. "Why not?"

"Dave's goin' to do it," and she drummed defiantly with her fork.

Libby Anderson sat very still. "You mean, Ma, that after this Dave is going to look after all the taxes?"

"Yes; he is."

"Why?"

"'Cause me and him agreed that was the best way."

"I guess, Ma," said Libby, very slowly, "that you signed something when Dave was here, didn't you?"

"I didn't sign your name to anything," was the stubborn reply, and she began piling up the dishes.

With that it rested. Libby did up the morning work, and started for town. "Pa wouldn't have liked this," she muttered as she rumbled across the bridge, and in some way that comforted her. Dave had a silky laugh, and a caressing voice, and was his mother's idol; but slow, plain, plodding Libby had always been near to the honest heart of Pa.

She went to the court-house, and there on the recorder's book she found it. Ma had deeded the place to Dave. She did not make any fuss; she was too old-fashioned for hysterics. She met one of the neighboring farmers on the street and admitted in response to his inquiry that she was not feeling very well.

It was not until the old place came in sight that she broke down. "It's not fair," she cried out, "when I've stayed here and worked — it 's not fair," and for the first time in many years she was crying, passionately crying.

It was a feeling of outraged justice that made her speak, for she was a just woman — the daughter of Pa.

"Ma," she said, "do you think Pa would like to think of your deeding the place to Dave, when I've stayed here and kept it up the best I could for twenty years?"

The old woman put down her knitting. "La, now, Libby," she said, not unkindly, "don't take on. You'll never want for nothin', and you're goin' to get your share just the same. Dave wanted me to sign that paper so he could go ahead with some business that was goin' to make more money for us all. It's just a — let me see — he called it a fermality."

"But, Ma," she protested, wearily, "don't you see that you've signed away your property and left it all to Dave and none to me, and do you think Pa would have liked it when I've stayed

here and worked, and Dave went off and left the place to run itself the best it could. Do you think Pa would have liked it, Ma?"

"I don't see why you keep holdin' up to me what Pa would have liked," she protested, petulantly, "when I tell you it don't make no difference whether the place is in my name or Dave's. You'll never want for nothin', Libby."

The spirit of Libby Anderson rose. "That's not the question whether I'll want for anything or not. I'm not a pauper, I'm entitled to something — I've earned it."

"La, now, Libby, don't go on about nothin'," and the knitting-needle clashed with finality.

Libby stood there looking at her. "I guess you don't realize what you 've done," she said, and turned to the bedroom to lay off her things.

It was not until the next month, the blustering month of March, that it was all made clear. It was early in the afternoon when Libby looked from the window and saw a man turning in at the big gate. Her heart filled with a strange fear, but she did nothing more tragic than look down to see that her apron was clean. When he reached the top of the hill she recognized him, and her hands grew cold. "That friend of Dave's from the city is coming, Ma," she said.

"Land sakes," exclaimed Mrs. Anderson, and such a day as 't is."

The stranger warmed his hands, and disbursed a number of pleasantries. Libby did not like him, though she saw nothing tangible against him except that he kept looking at her out of the corner of his eye.

"Well, Mrs. Anderson," he said, finally, "your son wants me to make a little proposition to you."

It was coming, the most awful thing of her life was coming, but she only reached down and stroked the cat.

Mrs. Anderson looked pleasantly expectant. "Dave's always makin' propositions," she chuckled.

"He 's been a good deal worried about you this winter, afraid you were not just comfortable out here, you two all alone."

"Dave's always thinkin' of his mother's comfort," she asserted, and looked triumphantly over at Libby.

"It's pretty cold out here, sometimes, isn't it?"

"'T is a little blustery, that's a fact."

"The wind manages to creep into an old house like this, doesn't it?"

"Good many cracks; Dave thinkin' of boardin' it up?"

"No," laughed the man, "he thinks he has a better scheme than that. You find the place quite a care, do you not, Miss Anderson?" he asked, turning his eyes full upon her for the first time.

"I don't mind it," she replied, dully.

"Well," he resumed, turning back to the older woman, "it worries Dave to think of your being out here alone now that you're getting along in years, so he's rented a nice little place in town, and he feels sure it would be better all around if you'd just go in and take it."

"If that ain't fer all the world like Dave! — always some new idear in his head. But you just tell him, Mr. Murray, not to be bothering, we don't want to move to town, do we, Libby?"

"Not if we can help it," she replied, her attentions still centred upon the cat.

"Dave's been away from the place so long that he don't see just how 'tis," Ma explained; "Libby and me wouldn't feel to home no place else."

"Of course — of course, that would be true at first," he acquiesced, sympathetically. "But it would only be a matter of a little time, and then you would be much more comfortable. It is really impossible for you to think of staying here any longer."

The last words had a different ring. Even Ma noticed it, and she looked uneasily at Libby. "Me and Libby wouldn't feel to home no place else," she repeated, "and we wouldn't feel right about leaving the place, would we, Libby?"

Libby did not answer, and the old woman looked at Dave's friend with growing anxiety.

"It's too bad you feel that way," he went on, persuasively, "for Dave was so sure you'd like the idea that he's gone ahead and made all arrangements, and — I'm afraid there might be a little trouble about unmaking them," — the man pulled his mustache down to cover a smile. "Of course you'll feel badly at first, but you'll like it better in town when you get used to it."

He turned to Libby. "How soon do you think you could move? By the first of May?"

"I suppose so," she answered in that dull voice.

Then he talked cheeringly to Mrs. Anderson of other things. "You'll like it better in town," he assured her, as he shook hands in parting. "After you 've been there a month you 'll say it was the best move you ever made."

"Maybe so," she answered, and turned a beseeching face to Libby.

The younger woman followed him out to the shed kitchen. "If there is any way of preventing it — I mean if there is any way of fighting this — we 're not going to move to town."

"Well, there isn't," he said, shortly, "your brother has sold the place. You can tell your mother or not just as you like, but you'll have to be out by the first of May," and without a softening word he drove away.

She did not know how she got back to the house, but probably she could do it just because she was so used to doing the things that lay before her. As she opened the sitting-room door the old woman looked around at her, helplessly — confidingly — the look of a troubled child.

"We ain't goin' to move to town; you won't hear of it, will you, Libby?"

Libby Anderson was not advanced enough to question the divine order of things, but it did occur to her that the world was a little queer. Ma had taken from her her birthright, and now it was back to her that she turned for help. She — the disinherited child — must still be the prop. From somewhere deep in her being words such as she had never even thought before were struggling up for utterance. They were on her very lips, and then she looked at the old woman crouched close to the fire, and habit — if not sympathy — asserted itself. She was used to looking after Ma; she would look after her now.

"Dave didn't know how you'd feel about it, Ma," she said.

"You can write him a letter to-night and tell him I don't want to go."

"All right, I'll tell him."

"It'll be all right then — that'll settle it."

Libby remembered the man pulling down his mustache to cover the smile, and made no reply.

"It'll be all right then," she repeated, resenting the silence; "Dave only done it 'cause he thought we'd like to move to town."

Libby had started to the kitchen. "Yes, Ma," she said, quietingly, "I know."

She wrote a long letter to her brother that night, part of it before her mother went to bed — that part she read aloud — and part of it after she had been left alone in the old sitting-room. The latter portion no one ever saw but Dave.

Next week they sent to town every day for mail. Ma said Dave must be sick, and Libby held back the bitter words, and assented that maybe he was. Another week passed — and then the letter came. Dave always wrote nice letters, and this was no exception. He was so sorry they were not pleased with the new arrangement. Had he dreamed they would not like it he never would have gone ahead. But now it was too late to go back, and he was sure they would like it better in town. He would come and see them there often, and would do all he could to make them comfortable.

A silence followed the reading of the letter. For the first time in all Ma's life Dave's cause was wavering. But it triumphed. "Dave means well by us, Libby. I can see he means well."

It was such an old voice — and so feeble; there was in it a note of pleading that made it appealing in its helplessness. "I suppose so," answered Libby, "I suppose he does."

April came, and for the fiftieth time the old woman watched the white give way to the green on the hills that curved in and out around her old home. She felt the frosty scent of winter yielding to the seductiveness of spring, and her old heart, warming within her, grew young again and lived back in the days when Dave and Libby were little, and when she and Pa worked about the place they had so proudly bought with the labor of their hands. All through those soft, sweet April days she sat out on the porch watching the old place re-deck itself in the glory of the spring. She said nothing about moving to town,

she had forgotten it, or she looked to it as something far in the future, something that would never happen.

As long as she could, Libby let her have her dream. Her heart was not hard toward Ma now — Ma had not understood. And Libby was glad she could have those few spring days before she was torn from the old home. But it was the middle of the month now, and the man said they must be gone by May. She would have to speak to her that afternoon. No — she would wait until to-morrow. She would let her have another peaceful spring twilight on the old farm, just one more of those rejuvenating April mornings.

And so she waited, and even let the next day drag to evening before she spoke. Ma was, as usual, sitting out on the little porch, looking off at the green hills, basking in contentment. It went hard with Libby to speak, but she had grown used to doing the things that lay before her.

"Ma," she began, "I think I will have to be packing up this week."

"Packing up what?"

"Why, don't you remember, Ma, we're going in town the first of May?"

"Oh, la, Libby, I've give that up long ago. I'm goin' to die on the old place."

"But you know, Ma, the arrangements have all been made. I'm afraid we'll have to go."

She turned to her crossly. "There's no use to argue wi' me, Libby Anderson, I ain't goin'."

"But what about Dave?"

"You can jest write Dave his mother don't want to leave the place. Dave won't have nothin' further to say."

She looked off at the meadow land as though it were all settled. Libby would have to tell her.

"Ma," she said, "it's no use to write to Dave."

"Why not?" she demanded, in a half-frightened, half-aggressive voice.

Libby did not have the knack of saying things smoothly. She was not silky-tongued like Dave. "He's sold the place, Ma," and she got up and leaned against the railing.

"What's that you say? Something about Dave selling my place? Are you gone crazy, Libby Anderson?"

"You know you deeded it to him, Ma. It was his after you did that, and he's sold it and we'll have to move out."

Hearing no answer she turned around, and it was then she coveted Dave's gift of saying things smoothly. The old woman was crouched low in her chair, and her face was quivering, and looked sunken and gray.

"I didn't 'low he'd do that," she faltered.

It was not much — not violent — but it was the first word she had ever spoken against Dave, and Libby knew how much it meant. She had not supposed Ma would be quite that crushed. She went over and took the wrinkled hands that were groping out as though something had been taken from them. "Never mind, Ma," she said, awkwardly, "poor Ma."

It was the nearest to a caress that had passed between them since Libby was a little girl.

Nothing more was said until after Ma had gone to bed. Libby supposed she was asleep, when she called quaveringly to her. "Libby," she said, "you mustn't be thinkin' hard of Dave. He must have thought it for the best."

Libby was used to caring for Ma, and she needed care now. "Yes, Ma," she answered, "I'm sure he must."

The next day she began packing up. Ma followed it all with her eyes — those sorrowful old eyes — and watched her put away the things that had stood in their place for fifty years. She did not go out on the porch at all that day, but just stood about watching Libby. Sometimes, when she was putting away something that Ma had most cherished, something that had seemed a vital part of the home, she looked at her reproachfully. But the subject of leaving the place was not broached between them.

Three days passed, and still they had not spoken of going away. Libby continued packing, and Ma stood around hopelessly, just looking at her. On the evening of the third day the house had lost its accustomed look. It was not home at all any more. Even the carpet in Ma's bedroom had been taken up.

It was not until the morning of the fourth day that the silence between them was broken. Libby got up to take down the clock,

when she heard a strange noise behind her, and turning she saw that Ma's head was down low in her hands, and she was rocking passionately back and forth, and crying as though her old heart had broken.

She put down the clock, and again she wished for a little of Dave's silkiness of speech. But she did not have it, and the best she could do was to pull Ma's chair out from the barren room into the sunshine of the porch. The hills, she thought, would still look like home.

That April morning was as soft and as beautiful as the ones that had gone before, but the sunshine had lost its power. What mattered it that the old place looked beautiful? — now that she was going away. All through the long winter she had waited for the spring to come, and now it was here — and she was going away.

Ma did not get up at all next day. Maybe she was sick, or maybe it was only that she did not want to go out in the sitting-room and see how unlike home it looked. But the next day she did not get up either, and then Libby went to town for the doctor. He said the excitement had weakened her, and did not seem very certain she would ever get up again. That night Libby wrote a letter to Dave, asking him again to let his mother die on the old place. A week passed, and an answer had not come, and still Ma had not left her bed. The packing was all done, it was the first of May, and she was just waiting — she did not know for what. Those were not easy days for Libby, the old house, the only home she had ever known, looked so awful in its barrenness, and the future was so uncertain.

Her whole soul rose up against moving Ma from the old place now when her days were so surely numbered, and so she sent a telegram to Dave, telling him his mother was sick, and asking leave to stay a little longer. There came a reply from his partner saying that Dave was in the East, and would not be home for two weeks.

Libby Anderson was not a woman of manifold resources. All she knew how to do was the thing that lay before her, and now she did not know what that thing was. She had forgotten her own destitution, she was only anxious to know how to finish her work of caring for Ma.

That night the old woman raised herself in her pillows and sobbed out the truth. "It's Dave that's killin' me — it's to think Dave sold the place and turned me out to die."

And then the way opened before Libby, and she saw her path. Ma was going to die — but she need not die with broken heart. She had loved Dave, and believed in him, for forty-five years. She must die loving him, and believing in him.

The disinherited child wrote a letter that night, and to it she signed her brother's name. Out in the world they might have applied to it an ugly word, but Libby was only caring for Ma. She was a long time about it, for it was hard to put things in Dave's round, bold hand, and it was hard to say them in his silky way. But when it was finished it some way seemed she had given Dave back to Ma, and despite her criminal work she sought her bed with conscience clear.

The doctor said next morning that it was a matter of but a few days at most, for Ma was much worse. She still kept following Libby with her eyes — and they were such hungry, disappointed eyes. The tragedy of Ma's life had come upon her just as she was going out.

"It ain't that I'm goin' to die," she said when Libby came in and found her crying, "but I was thinkin' of Dave. I keep thinkin' and thinkin' of him when he was a little boy, and how he used to run about the place, and how pretty he used to look, and then just as I begin to take a little comfort in rememberin' some of the smart things he said, I have to think of what he done, and it does seem like he might 'ave waited 'till — " but the words were too bitter to be spoken, and with a hard, scraping sound in her throat she turned her face to the wall.

Libby put her hand to something in her pocket, and thought of last night's work with thankfulness.

About eleven o'clock she entered the room with the sheets of a letter in her hand. "Ma," she said, tremulously, "here's a letter just come from Dave."

"I knew it'd come! I knew it!" and the old voice filled the room with its triumphant ring. Then there crept into her face an anxious look. "What does he say?"

"He's sorry about selling the place, Ma. He really thought